United Nations A/72/PV.111

General Assembly
Seventy-second session

Official Records

111th plenary meeting
Friday, 10 August 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 115 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(h) Approval of the appointment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Note by the Secretary-General (A/72/945)

The President: By its resolution 48/141, of 20 December 1993, the General Assembly decided to create the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In paragraph 2 of his note (A/72/945), the Secretary-General, pursuant to the provisions of resolution 48/141, proposes to appoint Ms. Michelle Bachelet of Chile as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for a term of office of four years beginning on 1 September 2018 and expiring on 31 August 2022.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to approve the proposal of the Secretary-General to appoint Ms. Michelle Bachelet of Chile as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for a term of office of four years beginning on 1 September 2018 and expiring on 31 August 2022?

It was so decided (decision 72/422).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Madagascar, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Ms. Razafitrimo (Madagascar): On behalf of the Group of African States, I would like to begin by commending Secretary-General António Guterres for his foresight in nominating Chile's former President Michelle Bachelet to lead the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, once again demonstrating his unflinching commitment to achieving gender parity in the United Nations system. With this appointment, he has also chosen conviction, professionalism, determination and above all recognized experience. The selection of Ms. Bachelet to her high office comes as no surprise, since as the first Executive Director of UN-Women she has blazed a trail as an icon in the struggle for gender equality and women's rights. With her political acumen and abiding love for her country, she led Chile as its first female President for two terms.

The African Group firmly supports her stance on multilateralism and advancing the foundational principles of human rights. We congratulate the High Commissioner and look forward to working closely with her in fulfilling her mandate. We also wish her every success in this exhilarating yet delicate responsibility.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Solomon Islands, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Ms. Mose (Solomon Islands): As Chair of the Asia-Pacific States Group, Solomon Islands has the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group, to express both our appreciation for the service of His Excellency Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, and our most heartfelt

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-25629 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

congratulations to Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet on her appointment as the next United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We appreciate the work that Ms. Bachelet has done as a proactive advocate of gender equality, the empowerment of women and health care, both in a national and international capacity, throughout her career. We acknowledge the work she accomplished in her role as the first Executive Director of UN-Women, as well as Chair of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health of the World Health Organization. Her strong leadership skills, coupled with her exceptional talent in bringing people together and her demonstrated dedication to world peace, will undoubtedly boost and strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide.

The Asia-Pacific Group would like to express its support for Ms. Bachelet, the newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights, during her tenure in office.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Auväärt (Estonia): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I welcome the Secretary-General's appointment of Ms. Bachelet as the new United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We offer her full support in the next few years. Her appointment comes at a time when the many conflict zones around the world pose challenges every day. However, we are confident that she will contribute with the same level of commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights as she has shown so admirably in her previous assignments.

We are glad to see another woman appointed to a senior position within the United Nations system. We would also like to wish the outgoing High Commissioner, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, all the best in his future endeavours. As we prepare to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, we reaffirm our sincere dedication to the protection and promotion of human rights and wish Ms. Bachelet every success.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour, in my capacity as representative of Argentina, to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) in supporting the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We wish her great success and wisdom in this new challenge. Her ongoing commitment, and that of her country, to the defence, promotion and respect of human rights is testament to her success in this role.

I shall now speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States in order to express our sincere congratulations to Ms. Michelle Bachelet on her appointment.

The members of GRULAC are very proud to welcome another High Commissioner from our region and continent. Ms. Bachelet is an eminent Latin American leader who will bring to this role an in-depth knowledge of the United Nations system, as well as vast experience as a former President of her country. We believe that the international community will greatly benefit from her strong leadership and experience in the field of human rights and the multilateral arena.

We would also like to express our Group's great appreciation for the appointment of a highly competent woman to that challenging leading role. We are pleased that this important work on human rights will be led by somebody with the level of commitment, passion and experience of Ms. Bachelet, who was the first female President of Chile and also the first Executive Director of UN-Women.

The members of GRULAC consider the protection and promotion of universal human rights — economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, including the right to development and the right to peace — to be of the utmost importance, and we recognize the central role of the United Nations in achieving international cooperation in that area. Promoting and protecting all human rights at the global level is one of the fundamental pillars of the Organization's work.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is a key player in the work of fulfilling the comprehensive mandates agreed by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council — a task in which we are certain Ms. Bachelet will be instrumental and for which the necessary financial resources must be guaranteed. In that regard, the members of GRULAC

urge that the activities of the newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights be guided by the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with the mandate based on which the Office was created by virtue of resolution 48/141, of 20 December 1993.

On the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the countries of our region would like to reaffirm that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that all human rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. We stress the need for the promotion and protection of all human rights to be guided by the principles of impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization, and in a spirit of constructive international dialogue, solidarity and cooperation. Moreover, the States members of GRULAC reaffirm our conviction that the primary responsibility of every one of us is to work decisively to ensure our peoples' full and effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In conclusion, we would like to assure Ms. Bachelet that she can count on the full support and cooperation of every GRULAC member in the fulfilment of her mandate, and we warmly wish her the every success in working to realize the full and effective enjoyment of human rights for everyone around the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Amadeo (United States of America): The withdrawal of the United States from the Human Rights Council was not a withdrawal from our commitment to advancing universal human rights within the United Nations system and around the world. The failures of the Human Rights Council to address some of the most egregious human rights abuses of our day make the Secretary-General Assemblyeral's selection of a new High Commissioner for Human Rights all the more important.

The High Commissioner can have a strong voice on those critical issues, especially when the Human Rights Council fails to live up to its name. It is incumbent on the Secretary-General's choice, Ms. Bachelet, to avoid the past failures of the United Nations human rights system, and in particular the Human Rights Council's consistent failure to address extreme human rights abuses in the western hemisphere, especially in Venezuela and Cuba.

The United Nations system has failed to adequately address major human rights crises in Iran, North Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere, and to end its chronic, disproportionate obsession with Israel. It is up to Ms. Bachelet to speak out against those failures rather than accept the status quo. We hope that she does. The United States will.

Mr. Hawke (New Zealand): Canada, Australia and New Zealand warmly welcome the appointment of Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet as the next United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ms. Bachelet brings a wealth of expertise to the role from her long history of promoting human rights in her own country and internationally. We particularly welcome her outstanding global leadership to date in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The promotion and protection of all human rights are essential and as relevant as ever. We offer our full support to the new High Commissioner and to her Office, and look forward to working with Ms. Bachelet in the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe.

We would also like to thank the outgoing High Commissioner for Human Rights, His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, for his tireless and committed work upholding the principles of human rights during his term.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson (European Union): I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The European Union warmly welcomes the appointment of Michelle Bachelet as the next United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ms. Bachelet's distinguished record of public service both to her country and to the international community will provide a strong foundation for her endeavours to further the protection and promotion of human rights across the globe as High Commissioner. Her profound understanding of the centrality of human rights, gained through her political attainments, personal experience of human rights violations, service as a doctor and contribution to the work of UN-Women and the World Health Organization, will find an articulation in her new role.

The European Union will do all that it can to support the new High Commissioner and her Office in the fulfilment of her mandate. The support of the international community is all the more necessary in these challenging times for human rights, as exemplified by a shrinking space for civil society, reprisals against human rights defenders, a failure to respect the human rights of all without discrimination, the prevalence of torture and profound shortcomings in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. All members of the international community should do their utmost to extend political and financial support to the new High Commissioner and her Office.

The European Union takes this opportunity to recall the tireless commitment and service that His Excellency Zeid Al Hussein has shown throughout his four-year tenure. We reiterate our support for the mandate, the Office and its independence, and stand ready to continue to cooperate closely to promote and to protect human rights at all levels.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): On behalf of the following countries — Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Sweden, Switzerland and my own country, the United Kingdom — I have the honour to warmly welcome the appointment of Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet as the next United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stands to benefit greatly from the appointment, particularly at such challenging times for human rights in many parts of the world. Her global leadership skills, coupled with her consensus-seeking approach, will serve as a platform to guide her in the important role that she will assume.

Ms. Bachelet has distinguished herself by the major contributions that she has made in her own country, Chile, as well as in international forums such as UN-Women and the World Health Organization. The appointment of such an inspiring and courageous woman as High Commissioner for Human Rights will help to foster our collective work on the promotion and the protection of human rights across the globe. It will also help to ensure a stronger voice for women on human rights issues, and it constitutes a symbolic step towards gender equality.

Her personal experience in history will bring a unique perspective on ways to address the multifarious aspects of human rights abuses and violations, including the importance of constant vigilance and the defence of human rights. We offer our full and unwavering support to the new High Commissioner.

We also take this opportunity to express our great appreciation for the work of Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein and the invaluable contributions that he has made in his role as High Commissioner over the past four years. He has spoken up tirelessly and courageously in defence of human rights throughout his mandate. We wish both the current and the future High Commissioners success in working to realize the full and effective enjoyment of human rights for everyone around the world.

Mr. Favre (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom.

As host country to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Switzerland would especially like to commend the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet as High Commissioner following her nomination by the Secretary-General. We look forward to welcoming her to Geneva and working with her to uphold human rights around the world. Switzerland would also like to thank High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein for his exceptional commitment throughout his term.

The establishment of the post of High Commissioner has made a decisive contribution to the promotion and protection of all human rights. Twenty-five years later, it is crucial to ensure that respect for human rights remains one of the priorities of the international community and guides the work of the United Nations.

Switzerland would therefore like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its full support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and its efforts to uphold all human rights.

Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi (Islamic Republic of Iran): It has been said that the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations is the most difficult job in the world. It seems that the next most difficult may be the position of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We would like to congratulate Ms. Bachelet on her appointment to an extremely demanding job, and we

wish her every success. We would like to ask her to lead the Office by addressing the expectations of Member States in accordance with resolution 60/251, Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and the principles they contain. In particular, we would like to address and emphasize the principle of the universality of human rights. In our understanding, the greatest challenge for the new High Commissioner will be to make it clear that human rights is not a foreign-policy tool for the powerful to use against whomever they dislike. The Office should speak out for all victims, be they migrant children in cages or the United States-made bombs that kill children on a daily basis.

Another important responsibility for the new High Commissioner will be addressing the sources of polarization and politicization in the Human Rights Council. In our understanding, country-specific resolutions that address only the political agenda of the sponsors undermine the Universal Periodic Review and should be considered the main source of politicization and polarization in the Human Rights Council. We wish Ms. Bachelet success in addressing all those important issues.

Mr. Iglesias Mori (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Chile is pleased with the appointment made by the Secretary-General. We welcome the membership's acclamation of the assumption by the former President of Chile, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, of the role of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are pleased to join in the words expressed by the Permanent Representative of Argentina on behalf of his country and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, as well as with the statements by other representatives and on behalf of the other regional groups.

Ms. Bachelet's appointment is a recognition not only of her personal history and merit, but also of the public human rights policies implemented in Chile and the role that our country strives to play in the multilateral arena to defend, promote and uphold human rights. President Bachelet's appointment is all the more important on this seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While the preamble to the Declaration represents the beginning of the recognition of the inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights of all humankind and of our minimum standards in the international arena, we realize that those standards are facing new and complex global, regional and national challenges. We therefore take this opportunity to reiterate the need to ensure that the international community unites to fully enforce the Declaration, unequivocally promoting human rights as a priority in our efforts to address the pressing global situation.

My country is pleased to congratulate the new High Commissioner for Human Rights and wish her every success. Chile will continue to work tirelessly for respect for and the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, without distinction. We are sure that the High Commissioner's efforts will broaden and deepen the international community's commitment to the universal values of human dignity.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I would like to remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first statement and five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Cuba would like to congratulate Ms. Bachelet on her appointment as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We trust that her proven experience and knowledge will ensure that she carries out her tasks in an exemplary fashion without the double standards, politicization and selectivity that some Member States would like to see established as criteria for a system of human rights.

The statement made by the representative of the United States leaves my delegation with no choice but to exercise the right of reply. We deeply regret that the appointment of Ms. Bachelet has been taken as an opportunity to single out my country through fallacies that confirm the pathological tendency of the United States to distort reality in the Assembly over the past two years. We reject such efforts to exploit the issue of human rights at Cuba's expense. We are very proud of our achievements and need no lectures by the United States or anyone else. We would like to point out that Cuba is a party to 44 international agreements on human rights, while the United States is a party to only 18. We therefore have every reason to stand by our achievements, say what we think and defend ourselves.

In our opinion, the United States, whose flagrant violations of human rights are of great concern to the international community, has no moral authority to impose its views on my country through its economic, commercial and financial blockade, under which the Government of the United States is also violating the human rights of more than 11 million Cubans. The United States is therefore in no position to lecture Cuba or anyone else.

We have serious concerns with regard to respect for human rights in that country, which is rife with cases of murder, brutality and police abuse, particularly against the African-American population. Firearms undermine people's right to life. In the United States there are stark displays of racial discrimination; further restrictions on health care that would leave 23 million people without health insurance are being considered; there is a gender wage gap; migrants and refugees, particularly those from Muslim countries, are marginalized; walls that insult its neighbours are being planned; and international commitments to preserving the environment and addressing climate change are being abandoned. The United States Government's practice of splitting up migrant families is particularly alarming, especially when it involves separating children from their parents — a cruel and inhumane practice that is a flagrant violation of human rights.

Also of concern are the violations of human rights committed by the United States in other countries, such as the arbitrary detention of dozens of prisoners in the illegally occupied Guantanamo naval base in Cuba, where people have even been tortured; so, too, are extrajudicial executions, the deaths of civilians due to bombs and drones and the wars waged against various countries based on lies about their possession of weapons of mass destruction, with devastating consequences for peace, security and stability.

Any strategy aimed at changing Cuba's political, economic and social system, whether through pressure and sanctions or more subtle methods, is doomed to fail. Decisions about what changes are necessary in Cuba, whether those that have been carried out since 1959 or those that are being undertaken now as part of the process of modernizing our economic and social model, will continue to be made by the sovereign people of Cuba.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The day that the United States Government decides to end the practice of separating Latin American children from their families and locking them in jails; the day that it decides to eliminate the practice of using drones for targeted assassinations; the day that the President of the United States stops claiming that torture is a legitimate practice; the day that the United States Government ends the use of clandestine jails that hold an indeterminate number of people without charge or the right to trial; the day that it decides to end its discrimination against the hundreds of thousands of people on the island of Puerto Rico who have been left to their own devices to recover from the ravages of a hurricane; the day that the President of the United States stops denigrating entire nations — and only on that day — will we believe that the United States is sincere when it speaks of human rights.

The words of the United States delegation are part of its aggressive campaign against Venezuela, which has even led to the public threat of use of military force, in violation of all standards of international law. Its attacks are an expression of the most racist and cruel Administration in the country's recent history. It has no moral right to even mention that topic, since an ideology of hatred has turned it into a threat to international peace and security.

In conclusion, we congratulate Michelle Bachelet on her appointment as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We wish her every success, because as we can all see, she will be facing a very powerful force in the next few years.

Ms. Amadeo (United States of America): Our delegation merely notes with disappointment the misconstructions, fabrications and false criticisms of the delegations of Cuba and Venezuela.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will be brief.

The delegation of the United States talks of fallacies, yet it would appear that it is suffering from pathological amnesia. The images of torture and the violations suffered by its prisoners are not fallacies. They are a reality that the entire world can appreciate. The United States representative will not talk about the recent emergence of sad, painful pictures of children chained up and kept in cages. Those are demonstrations of how the United States cares for human rights. I therefore do not think that they are fallacies; the facts illustrate what we are talking about.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (h) of agenda item 115 and of agenda item 115 as a whole?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.